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ABSTRACT

This preliminary report of a research project in progress briefly outlines Zimbabwe's historical, geographic, and cultural heritage and describes the methodology being used. Traditionally, Zimbabwean women are viewed as inferior and subordinate in a patriarchal society. They perform much of the work but have no political power. This study seeks to learn the extent to which developing countries such as Zimbabwe are actually contributing to the empowerment of women since the United Nations declared International Women's Year (1975) and through what channels this empowerment could be observed and even measured. Also of interest are the dynamics of the development process itself and how the strategies of development projects include, exclude, and affect women. Twenty-nine women and one man in and around Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, who were engaged in some development activity with an emphasis on women's issues were interviewed and four groups were identified which serve as the basis of the analysis. Group 1 was composed of the indigenous, rural women who were engaged principally in income generating activities designed to improve their marginal economic status. Group 2 was made up of indigenous, urban women, members of a textile union who met monthly to discuss work-related problems. Group 3 consisted of two women who held the only governmental appointments filled by women. Group 4 was composed of the directors of non-governmental organizations. The ongoing research will attempt to develop evaluative criteria to assess the impact of the four groups on the development of women in Zimbabwe. (JB)

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CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES: THE WOMEN OF ZIMBABWE

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CRUCIAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES FOR WOMEN IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(The Case of The Zimbabwean Women)

For those persons who have been so involved in Women's Studies and who remember Southern Rhodesia and have not had time to make the transition to Zimbabwe, let's start with a brief geography lesson. Southern Rhodesia was so named in 1890 when Cecil Rhodes occupied the territory for the British. Geographical observation number two concerns the fact that Zimbabwe shares a southern border with a most unfriendly and unneighborly neighbor - South Africa, the originator of the political practice of Apartheid or legalized segregation. Eighteen percent of Zimbabwe's exports go to South Africa, 32% of Zimbabwe's imports come from that country and between 75 to 80% of Zimbabwe's shipping goes through South African ports. In an effort to lessen this dependence on South Africa Zimbabwe is attempting with Mozambique to build the Beira railroad which would take exports out to the Indian Ocean through Mozambique. Much of South Africa's military maneuvering is around the destabilization of this activity, through the use of RENAMO guerilla forces. 6 to 10,000 Zimbabwe troops in Mozambique guard the vital link between Zimbabwe and the Mozambiquan port of Beira against RENAMO attack. The expense necessitated for this activity is estimated annually at $150 million Zimbabwean dollars draining funds that could be used for desperately needed domestic Zimbabwean development. (Coralie Bryant).

Former Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, is a subtropical

landlocked country with roughly nine million inhabitants. Ninety-six percent of these persons are black and most of the rest are British subjects who came to what was then Rhodesia to exploit the natural resources (mainly minerals) and the climate, which is delightfully mild, much of the year, and pleasantly removed from the less favorable climate of the British Isles. Although Zimbabwe has a thriving industrial base, about 52% of its inhabitants are engaged in the agricultural sector and women are dominant in the agricultural productivity of the country.

In 1980, through a mandated UN election, the people of what was then Southern Rhodesia voted to become Zimbabwe. The name Zimbabwe was taken from the earliest known black civilization which is located in the center of Zimbabwe and is for much of black Africa comparable to Stonehenge or the Egyptian Pyramids. The ruins of the Great Zimbabwe are a symbolic and spiritual sacred shrine.

Robert Mugabe is Zimbabwe's first Prime Minister. In 1987 Mugabe and his pre-independence rival, Joshua Nkomo healed their pre-independence schism; thus creating a one party government. Harare, the capital, which was formerly Salisbury, now has the characteristics of any Western metropolitan and administrative unit - modern government buildings, a vibrant commercial sector and boasts a magnificent central park which reminds one of a vibrant and picturesque botanical garden.

The per capita income for Zimbabweans is roughly $900 per year and Zimbabwe is classified by the United Nations as a developing country rather than one of the least developed countries. The literacy rate for Zimbabwe is one of the highest on the African continent - 74% of the population is literate.

Politically and economically Zimbabwe is one-half socialist - their avowed goal, and one-half capitalist. Capitalism represents the reality of the Zimbabwean economic system at the present time. Prime Minister Mugabe walks a tight-rope attempting to appease the capitalist entrepreneurs while at the same time responding to the socialist goals of the native population. He is accused of "socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor" in his strategies designed to keep industry from leaving his country.
Such a reaction would throw millions out of work. The country suffered great damage to its social and economic fabric through the decade of strife prior to independence when many companies did leave Zimbabwe taking with them capital and foreign investment which could lead to greater industrial development. Such an exodus at the beginning of independence and majority rule in 1980, did effectively damage the already fragile Zimbabwean economy.

Culturally, this African culture views women as subordinate. Patriarchy expresses, for example that women are not entitled

to any land use rights. Seidman (984) states that although women and men had access to land through membership in lineage groups women had no formal authority outside the home. They were considered minors under the fathers' or husbands' tutelage for their entire life. Traditionally, women were also used as objects of exchange between lineage groups and from victorious chiefs to loyal soldiers. There were also numerous controls over female sexuality in traditional Zimbabwean society. Polygamy was common and female infertility was one of the few grounds for divorce. Male infertility, however, was a taboo subject. Women were thought of as objects and were not expected to contribute in any substantial way to political leadership or to the basic solutions to any problems - theirs or their societies.

Yet women, as part of the African scenario, have the highest fertility in the Third World and can be expected to bear 6.4 children while the rate for the world as a whole is 3.8 and is 2.0 for the developed countries of the world. According to 1983 UNICEF statistics, twice as many Third World women as men are illiterate and in practicality most women have traditionally been forced to overcome cultural barriers to achieve an education. Barriers of access to education for girls persist and are ideological realities in much of Africa. A 1980 statistic reveals that illiteracy in sub-Saharan Africa among adult females was 73% compared with 48% for adult males. Peasant women have a heavy workload and are devoid of political

power. Viewed from the female perspective, this is reprehensible and allows no avenues to redress their avowedly subordinate status. (Allen and Williams, 1989) Although this information lumps all Third World women my hypothesis is that Zimbabwean women do not depart from these statistics significantly. It is depressing to note that Third World women perform 2/3 of the Third World's work, receive one-tenth of its cash income and own 1/100th of its property. This chronic overwork and exploitation of the Third World's female population has seriously damaging consequences for women, their husbands, their offspring and their societies presently and in the near future. Succinctly stated, "all work and no say."

Cultural patriarchy in Zimbabwean societies is further expressed in the attitude of the husband who thinks it is unacceptable that any woman make a decision on her own. He interprets such behavior as challenging his authority, as well as his control over his property. If he is accepting of female assertive behavior, he reasons, she will be on his level thereby threatening his self-concept as well as his status in the eyes of others. His analysis is consistent with his socialization in traditional Zimbabwean society. Conversely, women in this society are socialized to accept a subordinate position, to be apolitical and deferential. This cultural norm is being questioned by increasingly large groups of women.

How is the term "Women in Development" defined? Roodkowsky

defines it as meaning the relationship between women and development processes and procedures. She identifies 1975, the International Women's Year, as the turning point in bringing a new relationship between women and development strategies. The year provided the impetus, network, energy and the validity for a worldwide movement, massively increasing the awareness of essential and critical women's issues. Prior to the UN Decade for Women (1975) an adverse impact of development on women was noted and according to Tinker can be accounted for mainly in three types of planning errors: (1) The error of omission or failure to seek and utilize women's productive roles; (2) Reinforcement of values which restrict women to household duties, child bearing and child rearing, and (3) Superimposing Western values regarding "appropriate" work. The "Women In Development" concept evolved from the lack of progress noted in women's status following the first decade of development. This led to the changed definition of development in the second decade of development years (1970-1980). Initially, development meant development of industrial capacity and in the second decade of development, development came to mean the development of the human potential - including women.

With females constituting 52% of the world's population the observation after the first decade of development that the legal state of women was lagging behind the political and economic changes taking place in the rest of the Third World was highly significant. It had to mean that development

schemas were not working effectively. Women themselves became keenly aware of the fact that apparently changes, reforms, development strategies and revolution obviously were not meant for them in that first decade of development.

This concern stimulated measures designed to address this observed inequity. Adding greater impetus to the issue of women's issues following this first decade of development and during the second decade of development was The Percy Amendment, this measure was added to the foreign policy arsenal of the U.S. This Amendment mandated that U.S. assistance help move Third World women boldly into their national economies in order to improve their status thereby assisting in the "total" development process. Women and their concerns were to be brought into foreign policy consideration in all U.S. foreign policy decisions. Following this U.S. initiative the international development community adopted the "basic needs" strategy and recognized women's traditional role in meeting "basic survival needs." The development industry then recognized that they needed to insure women's stake in development if they were to accomplish their humanitarian goal of facilitating Third World development. The UN declaration of International Women's Year (1975) followed and is widely credited with bringing women out of political obscurity. Women, and the issues concerning women, achieved the legitimacy of an international forum. Parenthetically, the impetus for International Women's Year, originated with female development

professionals, researchers, activists and feminists. However, it is naive to minimize the importance of the UN lending its prestige and structure for women in 1975 to solve the problems of underdevelopment and eliminate the socio-economic structures that had placed women politically and culturally in a subordinate position. After all, with the goals of Equality, Peace, and Development, the International Year of Women, development efforts could no longer ignore the needs of women. Even with noteworthy specific initiatives, several tenacious barriers to equality continue to exist. In the case of Zimbabwe these are basically persistent traditional, attitudinal and structural barriers, bureaucratic inertia, ascribed inferiority and fear. Fear in the form of wife beating, polygamy, desertion, lack of legal protection and internalized resigned passivity.

An undefined uneasy awareness of the plight of African women led to my interest in discovering what specifically was occurring to women in one specific African developing country. I wanted to learn the extent to which countries such as Zimbabwe were actually contributing to the empowerment of women since International Women's Year and through what channels this empowerment could be observed and even measured. I was also interested in the dynamics of the development process itself and how the strategies of development projects include, exclude and affect women. Some failures of development have been attributed to the total exclusion of women from the deliberate

development process and it has also been noted that some development strategies have had an adverse effect on women.

The methodology for this research, which is a "work in progress", was initially the identification of 30 women in and around the capital city of Zimbabwe, Harare, whose activities had set them apart as being advocates for women. (In the summer of 1988, I received initial assistance at this stage of the research from Sociology Professor Rudo Gaidzwana at the University of Zimbabwe.) Gaidzwana has written extensively on Women In Development and last summer was teaching a course on Women In Development which I audited. The 30 women interviewed were primarily black and white professionals engaged in some development activity with an emphasis on women's issues. The collection of my field data came from these 29 women, (one man was interviewed) and I was able to identify the four groups described below which will serve as the basis for my analysis of development efforts in Zimbabwe.

Group One included the indigenous, dynamic, grassroots rural women who were engaged principally in income generating activities designed to improve their own marginal economic status. This is the numerically superior group. Cooperatives, for example, have been quite attractive in Zimbabwe and since the level of protein consumption in Zimbabwe is quite low a pig production cooperative was the method chosen by one group of eight women in rural Zimbabwe to attack several problems. Pig

production was being encouraged through outreach technical assistance via agricultural agents groomed by the Ministry of Agriculture. Pig production being less capital intensive and requiring less skill than raising cattle was a viable cooperative venture. The women responsible for this cooperative live in a remote, barren area of the country referred to as a communal area. In pre-independence days these areas were known as "tribal trust lands". The poor, unproductive land in this area was suitable for pig production and little else. The eight middle-aged women engaged in this cooperative project are resourceful, energetic and enthusiastic. They were utilizing the pig production cooperative project also for a numeracy and literacy class as well, taught by the only member of the project who was literate. They had also developed a small gardening project that enabled them to sell fresh produce to other members of the communal area. The profits were small but the money was "theirs" and facilitated their participation in the cash economy on a meagre scale that represents a decided improvement over their previous participation in the cash economy of the country.

Group Two was also made up of indigenous women. These were urban women and those I talked to were members of a textile union. These women met monthly to discuss problems experienced in their daily factory work. The July Saturday afternoon meeting I attended was devoted to a discussion of the latest

maternity leave legislation which had recently passed. These textile workers were highly critical of the legislation because, one: it did not provide a long enough maternity leave and two: although there was a provision for time off daily after returning to work, the time allotted was insufficient for mothers to nurse their babies. They reported that because of this legislation employers were showing preference for male job applicants for whom no such adjustments were necessary. It was concluded that the discussion today would be conveyed by a committee, to the Minister of Women's Affairs for appropriate political action. (This minister is one of the two female government ministers in the government - a Mrs. Barra.)

Group Three was made up of two of the women whose government appointments over 1) women and 2) welfare, were the only two appointments filled by women in the governmental structure. It is widely believed that both of these women were appointed to appease women who took such an active part in the struggle for independence. Seidman (1984) states that the leaders of ZANU, the party in power, repeatedly emphasized the party's commitment to improving the position of women in an independent Zimbabwe. The two political appointments give, at least, token expression to that commitment. Ideally, these women should be able to exert political leverage in the Party in the interest of women but results at this juncture appeared to be marginal.

Group Four were the directors of NGOs (Non-governmental

organizations), I classify with this group the urban black and white female development professionals. The NGOs appeared to have the best opportunity for positive outcomes in the interest of women. The ability of NGOs to use funds as political leverage if criteria for those funds are not met and because NGOs are usually not hamstrung with political and bureaucratic loyalties they have a unique opportunity to facilitate change. The one NGO which represented this most graphically in Zimbabwe was NORAD, the Norweigan Aid Agency. Conversely, there is also the possibility that NGOs, because of their lack of political and bureaucratic loyalties, begin to impose their own "humanitarian patriarchy" on the indigenous population, rather than seeking to cooperate with the people on their perceived and identified priorities.

In this report on my "work in progress" I have attempted to briefly outline Zimbabwe's historical, geographical and cultural heritage and to describe the methodology of my research. My work will be concluded as I develop evaluative criteria to assess the impact of the four groups described, on the development of women in Zimbabwe. This document may help establish some criteria for the development strategies in developing countries.

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